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Commission on the Status of Women
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Item 3 of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Discussion guide for the ministerial round tables to be held under the priority theme "Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls"

Note by the Secretariat

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2015/6 on the future organization and methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Economic and Social Council decided that the session of the Commission would include a ministerial segment to reaffirm and strengthen political commitment to the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, as well as their human rights, and to ensure high-level engagement and the visibility of the deliberations of the Commission, and that the segment would include ministerial round tables or other high-level interactive dialogues.

2. In accordance with the multi-year programme of work of the Commission, as contained in Economic and Social Council resolution 2016/3, the Commission will consider "Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls" as its priority theme for the sixty-second session, to be held from 12 to 23 March 2018. Further to that decision, it is proposed that, at that session, the Commission hold ministerial round tables to provide ministers with opportunities for high-level engagement on key issues arising under the priority theme.

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II. Organizational matters

A. Theme and topics

3. Under the priority theme "Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls", the Commission will hold four ministerial round tables, to be held in two parallel meetings on the following topics:

(a) Good practices in the empowerment of rural women and girls, including through access to education, infrastructure and technology, food security and nutrition;

(b) Good practices in the empowerment of rural women and girls, including through the prevention of gender-based violence and the promotion of access to justice, social services and health care.

4. The ministerial round tables should focus on the exchange of experiences, lessons learned and good practices in relation to the proposed topics. Ministers will be encouraged to look ahead towards realizing gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls and to realizing their rights to an adequate standard of living, a life free of violence and harmful practices, land and productive assets, food security and nutrition, education and health care. Ministers will be encouraged to highlight the steps and measures that are necessary and planned in order to ensure that national responses effectively contribute to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls and to the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, so that no rural woman or girl is left behind.

B. Participants

5. The round tables will provide ministers attending the sixty-second session of the Commission with the opportunity to engage in dialogue and discussion. They will be open to all Member States and observers.

6. Ministers are invited to indicate, in advance and preferably no later than 27 February 2018, the ministerial round table in which they would prefer to participate, as well as their second preference. Approximately 15 to 20 ministers are expected to participate in each round table. The Chairs of the ministerial round tables will have a list of ministers who have signed up for each round table, but no list of speakers will be prepared in advance.

C. Times and locations

7. The ministerial round tables will be held at Headquarters, in New York, on Monday, 12 March 2018, from 3 to 6 p.m., at the times set out in the table below.

Round table	Time	Location
Good practices in the empowerment of rural women and girls, including through access to education, infrastructure and technology, food security and nutrition	3–4.30 p.m.	Conference room 4
Good practices in the empowerment of rural women and girls, including through the prevention of gender-based violence and the promotion of access to justice, social services and health care	3–4.30 p.m.	Conference room 1
Good practices in the empowerment of rural women and girls, including through access to education, infrastructure and technology, food security and nutrition	4.30–6 p.m.	Conference room 4
Good practices in the empowerment of rural women and girls, including through the prevention of gender-based violence and the promotion of access to justice, social services and health care	4.30–6 p.m.	Conference room 1

8. The Chairs of the ministerial round tables will guide the discussion with a view to promoting interaction. Interventions are not to exceed three minutes, and an emphasis will be placed on dialogue. Ministers will be encouraged to ask questions and comment on interventions made during the dialogue. Time permitting, ministers may be given the opportunity to make more than one intervention. Written statements are strongly discouraged.

D. Outcome

9. The outcomes of the ministerial round tables will be in the form of Chairs' summaries, prepared in consultation with the regional groups through the members of the Bureau.

III. Items for discussion in the ministerial round tables

A. Background

10. The discussion of the priority theme "Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls" will provide the Commission with an opportunity to consider the topic in terms of the realization of the human rights of rural women and girls, which is necessary for their livelihoods, well-being and resilience.

11. Rural women and girls are disproportionately affected by poverty, exclusion and the effects of environmental and climate change. Rural women and girls face multiple and intersecting inequalities and forms of discrimination. Because of prevailing discriminatory gender norms, rural women and girls tend to be less educated than men

and boys, with less access to information, skills, training and labour markets, while facing greater risks of violence and harmful practices. Different groups of rural women and girls have particular needs and priorities, warranting tailored policy and institutional responses in order to reach all women and girls in rural areas and ensure that no one is left behind.

12. During the round tables, ministers will be invited to consider the questions in the discussion guide below and to focus on what needs to be done to accelerate the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to realize the human rights and empowerment of rural women and girls. Ministers are encouraged to identify effective policies, what needs to be done and who will take the required steps and measures. Ministers are also encouraged to use the discussion guide and to consult the report of the Secretary-General on the priority theme of the sixty-second session (E/CN.6/2018/3).

B. Discussion guide

Good practices in the empowerment of rural women and girls, including through access to education, infrastructure and technology, food security and nutrition

13. Realizing the right of rural women and girls to quality, affordable and accessible education throughout the life cycle is at the core of attaining Sustainable Development Goal 4. Despite the gains made in achieving gender parity in primary school enrolment in developing countries, much remains to be done to reach universal primary completion, especially in rural areas. Rural women and girls are at the greatest disadvantage in terms of schooling, literacy and adult education. Poverty and location are the factors that determine whether girls go to school, with the poorest girls in rural areas at the greatest risk of exclusion from school. Of particular concern for rural girls is the persistent and widespread lack of qualified teachers in rural areas. Greater and more systematic investments are required to achieve universal free public primary and secondary education for all and to provide educational facilities with qualified teachers at all levels in rural areas.

14. Infrastructure and technology, including information and communications technologies (ICTs), tend to reach rural women and girls last, even though ICTs are vital for relieving rural women and girls of their disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work and enhancing their economic and educational opportunities. The poorest people in rural areas suffer most from lack of access to water, especially the women and girls who are responsible for collecting it. Rural women and girls are also disproportionately affected by the lack of safe, dignified and private sanitation facilities. Limited access to energy and connectivity have negative educational and economic outcomes in rural areas. Global connnectivity through the Internet and mobile phones is on the rise, although a gender digital divide remains worldwide, with the 3.9 billion people who are offline being predominantly rural, poorer, less educated and women and girls. Rapidly declining costs of renewable energy technologies and decentralized sustainable energy solutions, however, have already begun to prove beneficial for rural women's livelihoods, well-being and resilience. Greater investments in gender-responsive rural infrastructure and technology, including ICTs, by Governments and the private sector are necessary for gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.

15. Fulfilling the right of rural women and girls right to food and nutrition of adequate quality and quantity is critical. Yet rural women and girls continue to suffer

from food insecurity and malnutrition, with the number of chronically undernourished people increasing around the world. Globally, women are slightly more likely to experience food insecurity than men. Goal 2 addresses the structural barriers that place rural women and girls at a disadvantage with respect to food security and nutrition. It is unlikely, however, that hunger and malnutrition will be eradicated by 2030 unless more coordinated efforts and greater investments are made to respond effectively to food crises around the world. This would mean expanding decent work opportunities and social protection in rural areas, increasing agricultural productivity and smallholder incomes, supporting smallholder sustainable agriculture and food production systems, and conserving and equitably sharing the benefits of agricultural biodiversity. It would also entail negotiating trade rules that protect domestic policy space for agricultural development and food security, while prioritizing women's empowerment and gender equality.

16. Ministers are invited to consider the following questions to help focus the dialogue:

(a) What steps have Governments taken to ensure that rural women and girls have access to affordable, quality education throughout their life cycles and that they complete such education?

(b) What investments are Governments making to ensure that essential infrastructure, including sustainable energy, sustainable transport and safely managed water and sanitation, improve the lives, livelihoods and resilience of rural women and girls?

(c) What steps have Member States taken to ensure that ICTs and other technologies reach and benefit rural women and girls with respect to their economic and political empowerment?

(d) What are examples of national policies that have resulted in rural women and girls gaining access to food and nutrition of adequate quality and quantity?

Good practices in the empowerment of rural women and girls, including through the prevention of gender-based violence and the promotion of access to justice, social services and health care

17. Extending social protection to all rural women and girls is a key enabler for the realization of their right to an adequate standard of living. Violence against women and girls is a significant human rights violation in all countries, the elimination of which is highlighted in Goal 5, target 2. Violence occurs in private and public places and takes many forms. Globally, over one third of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner, or sexual violence from a non-partner, at some point in their lives. Although data is not available for all countries, of the 48 countries with recent data on physical or sexual violence committed by a husband/partner in the past 12 months, 26 showed higher rates in rural areas than in urban areas. Evidence also shows that the prevalence of harmful practices, including child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation, may be more prevalent in rural areas. Those conditions are exacerbated by the limited access of rural women and girls to justice and the lack of effective legal, juridical and institutional remedies. Rural women and girls who are subjected to violence and harmful practices must also be assured access to essential social, health and justice services.

18. Achieving universal health coverage, as called for in Goal 3, target 8, is necessary for realizing the right of rural women and girls to the highest attainable

standard of health, inclusive of sexual and reproductive health and rights. Maternal deaths, many of which are preventable, are linked to inadequate health services for women and girls, in particular for the poorest and those living in rural areas. Distance from health facilities and qualified health professionals is a serious concern for rural women and girls. Mobile technologies have been helpful in some cases. Fiscal and social policies that facilitate investments in essential health-care infrastructure and social services are also needed to respond effectively to violence against rural women and girls.

19. Ministers are invited to consider the following questions to help focus the dialogue:

(a) What are examples of effective national laws, policies and services that have helped to prevent gender-based violence and harmful practices against rural women and girls and ensured their access to justice?

(b) What measures have achieved proven results in the provision of affordable and accessible health-care services for all rural women and girls and ensured universal access to sexual and reproductive health services and reproductive rights?

(c) How have Governments ensured that social protection coverage and gender-responsive social services reach all rural women and girls?